**LTFF**

Contrary to what you might think, most of your education has little to do with what’s in your textbook. Most of your time here is about self –discovery, about finding out things about others, and growing from the knowledge about what difference really is. You see, you may not have thought about it this way, but your country has been, and has always been, about the assimilation of different groups into something called America. It wasn’t always pretty, but in the chaos, this country became something great. Similarly, during your time here, you will meet people who are different in ways you may have only heard of. You will encounter political, ethnic and social identities, that quite frankly might make you uncomfortable. But embrace that discomfort, learn to converse with people with whom you have had no experience, whose lives are completely foreign to you. Embrace the disgust you feel when certain words, phrases or behaviors repulse you. Don’t excuse it, but understand it, because that is part of your education.

You see, I know the easy thing is to find the group that looks most like you, talks like you, thinks like you. I know the easy thing is to surround yourself with a wall of ideas you already had, and shape your entire experience based on maintaining the identity you arrived with. I know the easy thing is to cry out against injustice, real or perceived, and shame your opposition into taking your side. What is hard, is learning that you too have biases, and that if you don’t confront them, you are prone to give into them. What is hard is having conversations with whom you profoundly disagree, and using reason to find the point of disagreement, to set aside the overwhelming power of the emotion, the very emotion that will convince you it’s okay to set up these ideological walls. What is hard is having those conversations when you feel like you are the oppressed, and that it is not your job to do the reaching out.

But education is about doing the hard thing. If you left here with a perfect GPA and learned nothing about the people around you. We have failed you as an institution. So while today’s culture may make you feel like safe spaces are the only spaces to live, know that the country in which you live was made great by people, over centuries, struggling to learn what it means to live with difference. With respect, challenge the views of others, and prepare to have your own sacred cows challenged. Talk to me about how to have those conversations, and when you are in your groups learn as much from the people as you do from the assignment. We will have fun I promise you, and somewhere in the mix, I swear, we’ll get some Biology done…